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Speech of Senator Chauncey
M. Depew at the nineteenth annual
dinner in celebration of his birthday
April 23, 1910.



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SPEECH OF SENATOR CHAUNCEY M. DEPEW.

Mr. BRADLEY presented the following

SPEECH OF SENATOR CHAUNCEY M. DEPEW AT THE NINETEENTH ANNUAL DINNER GIVEN BY THE MONTAUK CLUB, OF BROOKLYN, IN CELEBRATION OF HIS BIRTHDAY, ON APRIL 23, 1910.

MAY 2, 1910.—Ordered to be printed.

Mr. PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN:

No language can express fittingly my pleasure at the renewal of your greeting. For nearly two decades you have gathered annually in honor of my birthday. Members of all political parties, and all religious faiths, men in the professions, in business, in journalism, in literature, in the multifarious activities and antagonisms of American life, lay their differences aside for this festive night, as they have done during all these years. This holding in abeyance and suspension the antagonisms which divide men upon many lines is only ordinarily possible at a funeral. Even in that case, some go as far as did the late Judge Hoar, who detested Wendell Phillips, and when requested by the family to be a pallbearer, sent back word declining, but with the remark, "I approve of the proceedings." It is a refutation of the universal charge against us that we are so absorbed in materialism that we have lost all faculty for the healthy enjoyment of association and that attrition of minds without rancor which promotes truth and longevity, for to-night, whatever we were yesterday or will be to-morrow, is devoted whole-heartedly and unselfishly to comradeship and good-fellowship.

At 76 the world ought to seem no different on its spiritual, its ethical, and its human side than it did at 46. A statesman and politician who had won many distinctions and been blessed with a multitude of devoted followers closed his career and his life with the pathetic inquiry, "What does it all amount to?" If I should attempt to estimate what the world had all amounted to for me from the day I entered Peekskill Academy at 10 years of age until this hour, volumes would not suffice, and, therefore, I sum it all up in this, "For a long life, abounding in good things, in a capacity for enjoying everything, in reciprocal attachments and contributions with multitudes of men and women, in more than my share of health and of happiness, I reverently thank God both that I am alive and that I have lived."

I read an account the other day of a Russian, named Ivan Kusman, who was admitted to the hospital in St. Petersburg at the age of 138.

He remembered Napoleon's burning of Moscow, and the few incidents that occur in the career of a Russian peasant. He was an agricultural laborer for a mere pittance during this whole period, and could neither read nor write. That is not an experience to be envied. It enforces Tennyson's lines, "Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay." But, on the contrary, when you think of Auber composing his best operas at 89, and Manuel Garcia still an instructor in vocal culture at 100, and Whittier singing immortal songs at 85, you are in contact with men who have lived and who know "what it all amounts to."

There is an eastern maxim that every man at 40 is either a fool or a physician. It is eminently true. That old Italian, Carnaro, who found all of his associates in Venice dying at 40, made up his mind that these tragedies were due to excesses. He had the strength of will to adopt a very severe but frugal regimen, both in eating and drinking. At 80 he published his experiences for the benefit of those who were still dying or likely to die at 40. At 90 and at 100 he repeated the publication and enforced the lesson of the happiness which had come to him with health and longevity, declaring the same might be shared by every man. His plan was very simple. He selected out of the many things he liked a few for his table, masticated thoroughly, long before Fletcherism was known, and limited the quantity by measurement upon the scales to half what he had usually devoured, reduced his wine to the minimum, and at that time tobacco had not been discovered.

Fifty-four years in public and semipublic life and upon the platform all over this country and in Europe for all sorts of objects in every department of human interest have given me a larger acquaintance than almost anybody living. The sum of observation and experience growing out of this opportunity is that granted normal conditions, no hereditary troubles, and barring accidents and plagues, the man who dies before seventy commits suicide. Mourning the loss of friends has led me to study the causes of their earlier departure. It could invariably be traced to intemperance in the broadest sense of that word; intemperance in eating, in drinking, in the gratification of desires, in work and in irregularity of hours, crowning it all with unnecessary worry. Pythagoras said "Beware of ballots if you wish to live long." In other words, the old philosopher advised keeping out of politics. In his time the defeated party ran the risk of death, or imprisonment, or exile, and so the advice was good, "Beware of ballots." But, in our country where the citizen is a sovereign and responsible for the government of his country, his state, his city, his village or his town, an active interest in public affairs and party management gives healthy circulation to the blood, healthy exercise and activity to the muscles, and inspiration and enlargement to the mind, and satisfaction in results which all tend to length of years and usefulness.

The year of my birth, 1834, seems a long way off on the calendar but mighty short in the retrospect. The Roman Emperor Hadrian spent the revenues of an empire upon astrologers who should forecast his future from the conjunction of the stars at his birth. If you are so inclined, you can have that work done now for 50 cents. But, suppose we leave the stars to the astronomer and come down to earth. In 1834 Cardinal Gibbons, Doctor Eliot of Harvard, President Benjamin Harrison, Justice Harlan of the Supreme Court, Colonel Robert

G. Ingersoll, and Edmund Clarence Stedman, the poet, also fell under the influence of the powers of Heaven and earth which started them on their careers. Every year has its distinction, but this one seems to have brought forth more than most others of the things which have influenced the world. In it were organized the first National Temperance Association and the first National Anti-Slavery Society.

The idea of temperance at that time was purely voluntary. Statutory restrictions had not been dreamed of. At that time and for twenty years afterward drunkenness was our national vice. At a large dinner like this a considerable portion of the guests would always be hopelessly gone, and at private dinners of fourteen, sixteen, or twenty it was common for several of the guests to be disgracefully drunk. This never occurs now, either at public or private entertainments, no matter how free the wine.

The purport of the antislavery movement was perfectly understood by the slaveholders and their sympathizers. Meetings in New York and in Philadelphia were broken up by riots which sometimes lasted for days and in which many were injured and large amounts of property destroyed. In Connecticut a mob with a brass band interrupted a lecturer for the abolition of slavery and drove him out of Norwich to the tune of "The Rogues' March." The legislatures of the Southern States called upon the Northern States to prohibit the printing of antislavery publications and did prohibit their circulation in their Commonwealths. President Jackson sent a message to Congress recommending the passage of an act for the suppression of antislavery literature.

The agitation begun by the formation of the National Anti-Slavery Society in 1834 continued with increasing volume and vehemence. The society preached the horrors of slavery and then on the patriotic side a sentiment that the Declaration of Independence should be true in spirit as well as in letter. After thirty years, at the cost of a million lives, and directly and indirectly of ten thousand millions of dollars, and up to date three thousand millions in pensions, slavery was abolished and the Declaration of Independence made true in our Country, both in letter and in spirit.

In that year occurred the first record of a beat in journalism which has become the life of the press. The Journal of Commerce established relays of horses between New York and Philadelphia and secured the news of the White House and of Congress a day earlier than the other New York papers.

There was great intellectual activity in the country resulting in breaking away from the old universities. A liberal education was thought impossible except at Yale, or Harvard, or Columbia, or Princeton, but in that year there were twelve colleges founded in different parts of the country, all of which are now successful and have done magnificent work in higher education.

Andrew Jackson was President of the United States and William L. Marcy governor of the State of New York. The President gave his approval to the party platform. "That political workers are to be rewarded with political offices, and political parties are to be held together by the cohesive power of public plunder." That doctrine controlled the civil service of the United States without check or hindrance for over fifty years. In that year the United States national debt was paid off and the country started with a clean slate. In that

year General Jackson gave his famous order for the removal of government deposits from the banks. This was the beginning of an agitation which threw our financial system into chaos. It made impossible currency upon a scientific basis, and was the fruitful mother of the country-wide and disastrous panics which have so often shaken our financial and industrial stability. The most delicate, difficult, and dangerous of all the functions of government, the one upon whose proper creation and administration rests the whole fabric of national and individual credit, the one which should be adjusted and settled by the lessons of the experience of highly organized governments for hundreds of years, has from that time to this been the sport of party warfare, political passion, and partisanship. The dead hand of that great, strong man still holds our financial system by the throat.

Our institutions and political policy came from England and were so modified by our ancestors as to meet conditions under a republican form of government and the expansive necessities of the new country. All power in the mother land was originally in the throne. By succeeding revolutions the people gained more and more power until now they have it all, and in many respects Great Britain in its government is the most democratic of all countries. On the other hand, we began with a distrust of executive power and authority and our evolution has been the other way. Our first confederacy was a rope of sand. In our government under the Constitution we protected ourselves against the executive by a clear definition of his powers, by the right to override his veto by Congress, by the veto upon him from the Supreme Court, and the power of impeachment. Our early Presidents who had taken part in the formation of the government were in thorough harmony with these limitations upon the President, and with the apprehension of kingly authority which had brought them about. With Jackson a new generation came into the government, a generation removed from the experiences and opinions of the revolution. The leader of this generation was one of the strongest, most self-centered, autocratic and arbitrary of men who have ever appeared in our public life. He not only defied Congress and the courts, but won the applause of the people and changed public opinion as to the powers and duties of the President. From his time until now there has been not only in the Central Government, but in the States, a growing distrust of the representatives of the people in Congress and in the legislatures and an increasing confidence in Presidents and governors. The literature of our magazines and of a large portion of the press casts doubt upon and arouses suspicion of the actions and the methods of successive Congresses and legislatures and appeals to the President or the governors to control and lead them. The writers put their faith in the executive and justify everything that he may do on the ground that the only safety of the people is in the strength, integrity, and courage of the executive against their betrayal by their representatives.

And yet, any competent man who will conscientiously and impartially study the question must come to the conclusion that the conditions of our National Congress are to-day infinitely better than ever before. There is no lobby at Washington. There are no interests there seeking to influence Senators and Members. For the times in which we live, for the varied necessities of our Government, for the legislation so much more difficult than it was in earlier days, both Houses of Congress, in ability and patriotism, will stand favorable comparison with

what are called the great days of Webster, Clay, and Calhoun. With Grant began the system of not only recommending legislation to Congress but transmitting bills prepared to carry that legislation into effect, and this by evolution has become the common practice.

In 1834 Abraham Lincoln was elected to the legislature of Illinois and began his extraordinary public career.

In 1834 Chicago received one mail a week, carried on horseback from Niles, Mich., and in 1834 the Whig party was formed out of the disruption of the old Federal organization and Democrats who were anti-slavery and believed in a liberal construction of the Constitution.

We can go back to this period for the beginning of the extraordinary change which has taken place in our business methods and social life. A railroad was built from Jersey City to New Brunswick and projected on to Trenton. A start was made on the Erie Road. The Harlem, which extended through the fields from the present site of the city hall in New York to the end of Manhattan Island, crossed the Harlem River. In other words, from small beginnings of a few miles for local traffic the expansion which began in 1834 has in seventy-six years covered the country with 234,000 miles of railway mileage and developed new territories with a speed unknown in the history of immigration and settlement. It has transformed our land from isolated communities in which individual initiative and enterprise supplied nearly all the manufactures which they required into great centers of industries where mills and factories with enormous capital can, because of cheap transportation, get their raw material from great distances and give universal distribution to the manufactured product and place their output upon the market at a cost so low as to make competition by the individual impossible. More and more the United States because of cheaper cost is bringing into every department of human industry greater capital and larger employment. It has produced, on the one hand, the gigantic corporation, and on the other, in self-defense, the labor unions.

The problems growing out of this development are the ones which this generation faces and of which the preceding ones were ignorant. There can be no reasonable doubt that the proper method of dealing with these great questions is not by government ownership but government control. Corporations are to grow larger and combinations stronger. It is the inevitable tendency of the times. The safety of the people is to be in having the hand of the government, through responsible commissions and courts, upon every process of organization and operation, in frequent reports and publicity, in the press constantly informing the people and in the President and Congress, governors and the legislatures, being in constant and enlightened touch with the situation. It is thus that we can promote beneficent expansion, give opportunity for individual initiative and prevent monopolistic control.

Just now there is both suffering and alarm because of high prices. I have not much sympathy with those who say that this condition is due to national extravagance. There was tremendous complaint of high prices in 1835. There is on file in the Treasury Department a copybook of the expenses of a clerk who wanted an increase of salary because of the unusually high cost of living. His family consisted of five persons and his food for the year cost him \$338.10. The Bureau of Labor of the Government estimated last year that the food for a

similar family now would be \$312.92. This clerk says that his boots cost him \$3.75, his cotton sheeting 10 cents a yard (both now are about the same), his lamp oil \$1 a gallon (now 10 cents), blacking of shoes 25 cents a shine (now 5 cents), flour \$8 a barrel (now \$7), transportation for himself and wife from Washington to Martinsburg, Va., and return \$32.03 (now \$8.02), Martinsburg being 77 miles from Washington; an ordinary cooking stove \$49 (now about \$16.50), and a firkin of butter \$10.22 (now about \$21.50). Extravagance is a relative, not a positive, condition. Nobody would live now as the whole country did in 1834 and 1835. Both men and women of that period were largely the manufacturers of their own clothes in their own houses. They cultivated their own little gardens without help. If they kept a horse, as many of them did, the care of the animal, the mending of the harness and the painting and repairing of the wagon were all done by the head of the family. The wife made the children's clothes, and ran the house and a kindergarten.

The laborer who comes here from abroad and continues, as he will for a time, to live as he did at home finds that upon our wages he is saving money rapidly and accumulating, according to his ideas, a comfortable fortune. In fact, many, retaining their habits of living which they brought with them, go back in a few years to lives of ease on little places upon the Continent. That sort of thing is carrying out of the United States a hundred million of dollars a year, but those who remain to become citizens, and those who are born here and are citizens, desire to live as an American artisan should and will live, in housing, clothing, food, educational opportunities for the children, and surplus for travels, books, and pleasure, which make the glory of American citizenship. By our system of protection we have made it possible for the American workingman to receive wages in many cases double and in all cases much larger than in other countries. But we have not as yet protected him against competition by immigrants who will work for what he can not afford to work for and live as he will not and should not be asked to do.

The most beneficent of the changes which have occurred during my time have been the laws granting rights to women. In my earlier days a woman's property was her husband's, his debts were hers, and it was not until 1848 that she could have her independent possessions or safety in any business she might undertake. It was still later that she was accorded the privilege of a higher education and her intellectual necessities as well as ability considered to be fully equal to man's. As I used to travel through the country on railway-inspection trips I noticed at every station a crowd of idlers. They knew the names of the trains, of the conductors, and the engineers, and were eager to tell the waiting traveler whether No. 2 was late or the Empire State Express on time. I noticed that they disappeared at noon and at about 6. Upon inquiry I found that they were supported by their wives. These capable, hard-working, energetic women were dressmakers or milliners or kept little stores, and their worthless husbands hung around the depot because they had no other means of passing away time unless the circus was in town or elections in progress, and turned up invariably for meals which had been earned by the wife. This experience has done more than all things else to bring me toward woman suffrage, for in all these cases she is assuredly the better half.

People are all influenced largely by their point of view rather than the merits of the question. When Captain Schmittberger in New York arrested a sleepwalker, the man said, "Hold on; you must not arrest me. I am a somnambulist." "I don't care a cuss what your religion is," said the Captain; "you can't walk the street in my precinct in your nightshirt."

Anyone who has had the opportunity to watch closely for half a century the psychological development of people finds many interesting results. The vast majority are neighborly, generous, sympathetic, and kindly. In the evolution of influences the other sort sometimes take the lead. The man who inquires about your health with a suggestion that you are in a decline, who sympathetically wants to know why your wife or daughter or son was not at church last Sunday, with an intimation that he considers his or her condition rather serious, who hastens to drop everything to convey to you some bad news, is common in every community. If some provincial journal which you are never likely to see has a mean article about you this candid friend buys two copies, puts them in sealed envelopes, with 2-cent stamps attached so that you will be sure to open them, and mails one to your wife and one to yourself. I wonder what this person, who fears or is ashamed to give his name or address, gets in return for this investment of 4 cents. He may gloat over imaginary suffering as worth that expenditure, but can never be sure that his bolt hits the mark. He is a blind speculator in malice and meanness.

Coming from a long railway journey I landed in the Grand Central Depot one morning between 4 and 5 o'clock. A man stepped up to me and said in regard to a very dear and valued friend: "Have you heard about Jim?" I said, "No. What?" He hit me a whack in the back that sent me off the platform onto the rails and shouted, "He is dead. My God! he is dead." When I recovered sufficiently, I said, "How came you to be here at this early hour?" The answer was, "The family sent me to meet you and break the news gently."

There is a singular prevalence, temporary I am sure, of this sentiment just now. A well-known writer, whose contributions are very acceptable to the magazines, told me that he thought there had been quite enough of misrepresentation and unfair criticism of President Taft and his administration, and so he wrote some articles stating the conclusions which he had arrived at, and the reasons for them, which were favorable to the President. His employers, the publishers, said, "Our readers don't want that. If you have any scandal about any public man or about Congress with enough truth to make it, when properly presented, seem to be very bad and, therefore, sensational, that suits our readers and increases our circulation."

I heard a story from a journalistic friend, who publishes a broad and liberal paper, that the proprietor of one of the newspapers who makes this view of measures and men a specialty, having been absent for some time, turned up in the editorial rooms and called the staff about him and wanted to know if they had been off on a vacation. "Why?" said the astonished manager and editor. "Because," said the boss, "I have not seen anything which flays or dissects anybody for a week." "But," said the manager, "no one of any account has said or done anything for a week." "Well," said the boss, "we have got to keep up our reputation or lose our circulation. Take the hide off Bishop Potter."

The boys of my period were inspired as no other generation has been by books by the Waverley novels. If the ground was susceptible, they created statesmen, soldiers, and poets, and aroused ambitions in receptive minds to be followed by the best efforts of which they were capable. It was a liberal education to read Dickens's novels as they came out one after another; the enjoyment in the last and the eager expectancy of the next were sensations never forgotten. Dickens's intimate picture of the life of the ordinary home, its joys, its sorrows, its comedies and tragedies, touched every heart and broadened every mind. So, when Thackeray's novels began to appear, their exquisite literature, their superb English, their masterly dissection of human motives and springs of action gave exquisite pleasure and created a generation of brilliant thinkers and great writers.

Two years ago, while in Europe, I was at one of the big hotels at a watering place on the Continent. The table of the reading room was strewn with cheap editions which the visitors had read and left behind. I never dreamed that so much eroticism, nastiness, and brutal depravity could be printed and sold by reputable booksellers. But a popular writer told me that the publishers claimed this was the public taste and it demanded novels whose basic action should be domestic infelicities brought about by faithless wives and husbands and immoral adventuresses, and that no detail should be omitted which would give spice to the narrative. This sort of thing can be done in a French novel so as to seem a work of art, but in English it becomes the quintessence of badness and vulgarity. In the course of a half century I have noticed these cycles. It is difficult to decide whether they are protests against Puritanism or a certain and sudden eagerness to show that contact with the worst is not injurious. Happily, this deluge of filth did not sweep over our country, and the reaction in Europe is leading to happy results. Serious books by eminent men upon live topics and with lofty ends are becoming popular, and the wings of genius, scoured of mud, are working to lift the novel, which is the companion and preacher of our daily life, into the air which was breathed by Walter Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, and Kingsley.

Unhappy is the man who is not so much dissatisfied with what he has as with what the other fellow possesses. Happy is the man who, looking over his life, its associations, its incidents and accidents, its friendships and its enmities, would not exchange with anyone, living or dead. A successful politician who incurred a great deal of abuse used to comfort himself by saying of his critic, "That man will die and go to hell." He always came into my office immediately after one of his enemies had departed and would simply remark, "He is there." The result of this gentleman's view of those who disagreed with him led to a general exclamation when he died himself, "Well, he is there."

Galileo, being one day in the cathedral at Pisa, watched the oscillations of a lamp suspended from the ceiling. He observed that the vibrations were performed in equal time, and from that he invented the clock and the machinery whose accuracy created modern astronomy. But people had been watching the swinging of that lamp for hundreds of years and saw nothing in it. Its lesson came to Galileo because he was the most eminent of the trained scientists of his time. James Hargreaves lived by spinning and weaving, his wife and children helping him. He was always experimenting and all his experi-

ments were failures. One day the youngest member of the family, toddling over the floor, fell against the spinning wheel while it was working and upset it. Hargreaves noticed that while he retained the thread in his hand the wheel continued to revolve horizontally for a time, giving a vertical rotation to the spindle. That suggested the spinning jenny, which, by giving England the command for so long a time of the cotton industry, made her one of the greatest manufacturing countries in the world. The lazy man says, "What a lucky accident," but Hargreaves had been trying for twenty years to discover this secret. Hundreds of weaving machines had been upset in the meantime, but it was the training, experience, and genius of the observer which brought about this result. Charles Goodyear spent the best part of his life trying to produce vulcanized india rubber. Angry at his failures, he flung a piece of rubber upon a hot stove, to find afterwards that the problem was solved. Rubber had been burned in one form or another ever since it was discovered, but it was the mind intent for so long upon the one purpose which saw in the accident the realization of his hopes. So, my friends, the longer we live the more firmly we are convinced that it is only training and work which win. A people have recently been discovered in one of the islands in the Bay of Bengal who wear no clothes, for in that climate they need none, who do not have to work for food because it grows in superabundance upon the trees, while a little exertion gathers fish from the stream or game from the forest. Under these conditions of absolute indolence and no necessity for exertion their average age is twenty-six years, while the hardy peasants of the Balkan Mountains, who with the greatest difficulty can scratch enough for existence out of the inhospitable soil, are the longest lived races in the world.

It is a glorious thing for any people to have thrills of enthusiasm. I think all of us, no matter what our views of him may be, no matter how much we differ with him in opinion, no matter how much he may have antagonized some of us by his actions, feel prouder of the product of American liberty and opportunity because the eye of the world is just now filled, to the exclusion of all other men, by the virile figure of Theodore Roosevelt.

In closing this seventy-sixth anniversary there rises out of the past this fact of hope and aspiration. During all my earlier years I sat under the preaching of a learned preacher of the old school Presbyterian Church. His most fervid sermons were on Christmas and Easter. He claimed that there was no historical authority for these dates, and denounced them, to use his own language, as "Popish superstitions." Liberalism or modernism, or rather Christian charity, has softened the antagonisms and lowered the barriers between churches and creeds. In these days of Christian unity in faith with liberty in forms, around every altar on Christmas are evergreens and on Easter flowers. The question of dates becomes insignificant compared with the tremendous consequences to humanity from the Birth and Resurrection, and all can now unite in a common celebration of these festivals. It is a long step toward the peace of the world, the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.



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